International service learning (ISL) programs are growing more popular with students looking to advance their skills and knowledge to become global citizens. While the benefits of these programs among students are well documented, little is known about the implications they have on the host communities themselves. This volume explores the impact of ISL programs on members of host communities (e.g., host families and local partner NGOs), who are increasingly influenced by the presence of international students in their lives. Drawing upon post-colonial, feminist, and other critical and decolonizing theories, it examines the complicated power relations between North American ISL students and host communities in Southern East and West Africa, the Caribbean, and Central America. It stresses the importance of developing trusting relations between ISL students, faculty, and individuals in the host communities to create mutually engaging learning experiences.

Marianne A. Larsen is Professor of Comparative and International Education at the University of Western Ontario, Canada.
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This book would not have come together without the tireless work of my editorial assistant, Jennifer Kozak. She brought to this project her experiences participating in and facilitating an ISL program, as well as her unwavering enthusiasm and top-notch attention to detail. Thank you, Jen, for all of your work on this project.

Marianne A. Larsen, Editor
Part I

Overview
1 International Service Learning

Engaging Host Communities—Introduction

Marianne A. Larsen

Each year, hundreds of thousands of global North post-secondary students participate in volunteering and study abroad programs, including international service learning (ISL), with the aim of developing their skills and knowledge to engage more fully in local and global civic affairs (Lewin, 2010). Yet, many are calling for substantial increases in the numbers of students who participate in these international programs. The Lincoln Commission has called for one million U.S. students to participate in study abroad by 2016–2017, and the Canadian Bureau for International Education advocates that at least 15% (or 300,000) of Canadian post-secondary students should have a study/service abroad experience (Lincoln Commission, 2005; Statistics Canada, 2014).

There is a growing field of research on how students are transformed through their participation in ISL internships. However, much less is known about the communities, primarily in global South settings, that host these students. What do they gain, if anything at all, from having these students live in their communities for extended periods of time? What are the implications, both positive and negative, for these communities who host foreign students? The need to consider (and prioritize) the views and experiences of those in the global South who host global North ISL and study abroad students has been noted for many decades now (Illich, 1968). More recently, many other scholars have called for research on this topic (Crabtree, 2008; Cruz & Giles, 2000; Erasmus, 2011; Grusky, 2000; Kiely & Hartman, 2011; Ogden, 2007; Stoecker, Tryon & Hilgendorf, 2009; Tonkin, 2011). There are compelling reasons to engage in this research, as Adrian Bochner and Stephen Furnham (1986) explain:

[All]l contact has two-way reciprocal consequences, although the extent to which each party is affected by the interaction depends on a variety of factors. To ascertain better the true impact of the exchange experience, it is necessary to consider both the exchange students themselves and the receiving groups in the host culture. (p. 44)

Although there is an urgent need for such research that examines the implications of “reciprocal consequences,” there is actually very little existing
published research in this area. This book, *International Service Learning: Engaging Host Communities*, addresses that need by interrogating the complicated and complex impact of ISL programs in global South host communities. To this end, there are three main objectives to the book:

1) To problematize the impact and influence of international service learning programs on individuals and groups in host communities in the global South.
2) To legitimize and privilege the experiences, values, and voices of those in global South communities that host ISL students.
3) To provide possibilities for rethinking paternalistic and colonized relations between global North and global South communities, in favor of relations based on principles such as interdependence, reciprocity, solidarity, and mutuality.

To address these goals, this book brings together a wide range of individuals who share findings from their empirical research and have years of experience participating and facilitating ISL programs through work in universities, and third party intermediary organizations, including NGOs and private providers. The authors of the book report on their findings drawn from their ISL research that highlight the experiences of those working within intermediary and other partner organizations, host families, community leaders, and others in the local community who have had regular contact with foreign ISL students over the years. Most importantly, *International Service Learning: Engaging Host Communities* includes chapters authored (and co-authored) by individuals from Ghana, Kenya, Nicaragua, and Uganda who have facilitated and overseen ISL programs in their communities.

**ISL AND HOST COMMUNITIES: LITERATURE REVIEW**

Since there is little existing literature on the impact of international, experiential programs on host communities, it is helpful to turn to findings from studies on the impact of service learning (SL) on local (i.e., domestic) communities. This review is done with the recognition that in many ways, ISL differs from domestic service learning; however, the research on SL provides a strong base upon which to conduct ISL-host community research (Eyler, 2011). That being said, it is also important to acknowledge the potentially different socio-historical and geo-political spaces within which ISL functions, and that often the degree of difference between students and host community members is enhanced in international settings.

Summaries and reviews of the existing literature reveal a number of key findings stemming from this research (Cruz & Giles, 2000; Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001). Some existing research shows how SL contributes
to community development by providing data for leveraging resources and by strengthening horizontal linkages through networking amongst community agencies. For example, Worrall (2007) points out in her study of community partners involved in a community-based service learning program that many community-based organizations entered into SL relationships with the local university because they perceived access to new resources. As one of her respondents explains, “We’re understaffed, over burdened, under-resourced, we’ll take all the hands we can get. And that’s the really practical answer” (Quoted in Worrall, 2007, p. 14).

There are also studies that show how service learning bridges town-gown divides by enhancing community-university relationships and providing a link between the university and community-based organizations. This occurs when there is clear and open communication, and an understanding of each partner’s roles and responsibilities, assets, and limitations between all partners (e.g., Sandy & Holland, 2006; Vernon & Ward, 1999).

Existing studies have also shown that SL offers benefits to community partners through accessing university resources, budgetary savings, the use of the ‘free’ labor of student volunteers, an appreciation of the energy and enthusiasm of student volunteers, enhancing organizational capacity, and contributing to the visibility of the community organization (e.g., Driscoll et al., 1996; Miron & Moely, 2006; Vernon & Ward, 1999). For example, one study found that university SL students, as part of a workforce of partner organizations, help to extend the capacity of those organizations to take on new projects that they might not have had the time or capacity for otherwise (Sandy & Holland, 2006). Moreover, a number of studies have shown that local partner organizations feel they play a role in the preparation of future professionals by teaching local students about racial, ethnic, and socio-economic inequalities (e.g., Worrall, 2007).

In addition, there are a few studies that focus on the transformative impact of SL students on community members. One study showed that community members engaged in reciprocal tutoring programs with university students seemed genuinely transformed by the service experience. Their confidence was enhanced and they came to see university students as “human beings with dreams, problems, and aspirations similar to their own, reduction of stereotypes took place—the class format empowered community member students to speak up, trust their views, and look for solutions” (d’Arlach, Sánchez, & Feuer, 2009, p. 13). Community partners in Marie Sandy and Barbara Holland’s (2006) study spoke about ways in which partnerships can transform knowledge by bridging the gap between theory and practice, providing opportunities for reflection and furthering new theories to change existing practices.

Despite these documented benefits about the positive impacts of service learning partnerships on local community members, research also shows the negative effects of these arrangements. Some studies have highlighted the demands on time and resources that local organizations face in training and
supervising SL students, as well as a concern about the lack of communication between the local agency and university (e.g., Vernon & Ward, 1999; Stoecker et al, 2009). A number of studies point to the unequal relations and lack of reciprocity between the university (or college) involved in the service learning partnerships and local community organizations (Shalabi, 2013; Stoecker et al, 2009). For example, community partners interviewed in Sandy and Holland’s (2006) service learning study spoke about the lack of engagement with university faculty and a desire to work more directly with them. Similarly, based on the results of her study of community organizations involved in local SL partnerships, Worrall (2007) concluded that none of the organizations “indicated that there was a genuine sharing of power and resources, nor a defined set of mutually agreed upon goals and objectives” (p. 14). This lack of agreement over goals and expectations can contribute to conflicts between universities and community organizations involved in SL partnerships (Prins, 2005).

This theme also arises in the literature on the impact of study abroad and voluntourism programs on host communities, especially in the global South. Scathing critiques of the impact of international ‘excursions’ to the global South have been voiced for decades, and Ivan Illich’s 1968 piece “To Hell with Good Intentions” is one such example. Broadly speaking, much of this critique has focused on the damaging consequences of well-intentioned students who participate in short-term study and service abroad programs. Many question whether international students who are studying abroad or engaged in service are actually meeting the needs of the local community (Ver Beek, 2002), and suggest that these international experiences are much more self-serving than altruistic (Heron, 2007; Ogden, 2007; Tiessen, 2012; Zemach-Bersin, 2007). Others go so far as to claim that the students engaged in these types of international activities reinforce colonial relations by engaging in new forms of imperialism, akin to “missionaries, colonizers, anthropologists, and humanitarian aid workers who have served as ‘goodwill ambassadors’, promoting soft power interests of the metropole” (Zemach-Bersin, 2007, p. 24).

While much of this research is rich theoretically, it is weak in that it presents broad generalizations based on anecdotal, descriptive information, rather than empirical evidence (Cruz & Giles, 2000). As Richard Kiely and Eric Hartman (2011) conclude, “Much of the ISL literature is not empirical, cumulative, or theory-based while descriptions of programs, activities, nuts and bolts, and rationales for ISL are plentiful” (p. 303). Two exceptions consist of empirical research on the impact of study abroad on host communities, which focuses on the experiences of host (home-stay) families (e.g., Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002; Ogden, 2007; Stephenson, 1999), and ISL research that focuses on partnerships as unit of analysis (e.g., Erasmus, 2011; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Schroeder, Wood, Galiardi, & Koehn, 2009; Shalabi, 2013; Sharpe & Dear, 2013; Wood, Banks, Galiardi & Worrall, 2007). This research is important in focusing on
those working within NGOs and other partner organizations, their motivations for engaging in ISL partnerships, and the benefits and challenges that accrue from these relationships. However, these studies leave out the voices of others in the local community that students interact with during their stays, a point taken up in further detail below.

Finally, it is worth noting that the existing research reviewed above is carried out by individuals in the global North universities, rather than by individuals from the global South. Mabel Erasmus’s (2011) study of her experiences hosting study abroad and ISL students from the United States at the University of the Free State in South Africa is one of the few exceptions. This book is an attempt to address the lack of community voice in ISL research, as well as the other related lacunae noted above.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

*International Service Learning: Engaging Host Communities* brings together an inter-disciplinary, intersectoral, and international group of individuals that includes new, emerging, and experienced scholars in the field of ISL research, and individuals working within universities, NGOs, and private sector intermediary organizations that plan and facilitate ISL programs. Significantly, this book includes the voices of individuals from communities in the Caribbean, Central America, and Africa, such as staff working in host-community NGOs that facilitate ISL programs, host families, community leaders, and others in the local community that interact regularly with ISL students.

Part I of the book consists of this introductory chapter and Chapter Two, in which a number of the authors who have written chapters for the book engage in a shared discussion about the epistemological, theoretical, and methodological challenges of carrying out ISL research in and with host communities. They review what the existing literature and their own experiences as global North researchers tell us about the challenges involved in conducting research in global South communities. They problematize their own research, reflecting critically upon their positions as privileged outsiders engaged in host community research, and point out the ethical dimensions and challenges of carrying out this research.

Part II is comprised of case studies about the impact of ISL on host communities. These qualitative case studies were carried out between 2012–2015 to study the impact of North American ISL programs on host communities in the Caribbean, Central America, and Africa. The first three chapters focus on host communities in Central America. In Chapter Three, Nora Pillard Reynolds and her Brazilian co-author, Junior Cezar Gasparini, examine Nicaraguan community partner motivations in engaging in an ISL partnership, and the need to be reflexive about the kinds of relationships we develop through these partnerships. In Chapter Four, Harry Smaller and Michael O’Sullivan, both Canadian university-based researchers who have
had many years of experience participating in and facilitating ISL programs in Nicaragua, report on the findings of their case study, which involved interviews with members of five western Nicaraguan communities that have hosted Canadian ISL students, as well as Managua-based Nicaraguans who have been involved in developing and coordinating ISL programs. In Chapter Five, Cynthia Toms Smedley addresses the impact of ISL programming on economic development in three rural communities in Costa Rica. She reports findings from three case studies she carried out on the impact of ISL programs on Costa Rican communities, and the ways in which the presence of ISL students has affected the capacity of host community organizations.

The next four chapters in Part II shift attention to ISL programs that have taken place in various African communities. Barbara Heron’s Chapter Six provides the link between these two sections in that she draws upon data from a larger research study about the impact of ISL on communities in Guatemala, South Africa, Malawi, and Zambia. Her chapter focuses on the perspectives of global South NGO staff members about international volunteers, including ISL students, and outlines both the benefits and costs associated with ISL programs for Southern host communities.

The other three chapters in Part II concentrate specifically upon the impact of ISL programs in East African communities. In Chapter Seven, Marianne Larsen presents findings from her case study involving interviews with Tanzanian community members who have hosted Canadian ISL students for over 10 years, and like Heron’s chapter, addresses both the benefits and challenges associated with these international programs. Jessica Arends’s case study (Chapter Eight) aims to understand the complex relationship between community partners and ISL participants. She notes how perceptions of race, gender, and cultural norms complicate those relationships and obfuscate the purpose of these experiential activities for students and community partners.

The last two chapters in Part II are based on research about Canadian university students who have participated in ISL programs in Ghana. In Chapter Nine, Shelane Jorgenson discusses the discourses that shaped North American students’ desires to participate in ISL (and other forms of voluntourism) programs and the effects of these discourses on a host post-secondary community. In Chapter Ten, Katie MacDonald and Jessica Vorstermans draw upon their years of experience working with a Canadian organization that facilitates ISL programs. The results of their study interviewing host families in Ghana leads them to conclude that there is a pressing need to involve hosts in all aspects of ISL planning and programming.

The chapters in Part III of the book focus on the ways in which we can rethink, re-envision, and re-theorize relations between all of those involved in ISL programs, with a particular emphasis on those who host North American ISL students. In Chapter Eleven, Joselin Hernández, a Nicaraguan woman who has had many years of experience organizing and facilitating ISL programs, reflects upon the limitations and challenges Nicaraguan and
Ecuadorian community members have faced in hosting North American students, as well as ways to improve these relationships by prioritizing community needs, developing clear donation policies, and developing trusting relationships. In Chapter Twelve, Samantha Dear and Ryan Howard show how interdependence necessitates a long-term presence, and an understanding that both parties (students and hosts) are empowered to learn from one another. In Chapter Thirteen, Jessica Murphy draws upon her research of ISL programs in Haiti and presents the Haitian/Ayisen idea of repéwoste (reciprocity) as the basis for rethinking relations between ISL students and host community members.

Chapters Fourteen and Fifteen are both based on discussions that have taken place between university-based Canadians who have been involved in facilitating ISL programs and individuals in the communities that have hosted the Canadian ISL students. Chapter Fourteen developed out of a conversation between Ghanaian Godwin Agudey and Canadian Hannah Deloughery, who had been working together in ISL programs in Ghana since 2010. They discuss the reaffirming and transformative relationships that they have witnessed in their work together, as well as the messiness of learning in relation to others. Chapter Fifteen also developed out of a collaborative conversation between global North (Tamara Baldwin) and global South (Salim Mohamed and Juliet Tembe) individuals who have been involved in facilitating and thinking about ISL partnerships for many years. Through their reflections and discussions, they explore the potential of an ISL discourse of ethical engagement, not only for students, but also for ISL educators. Like many other authors in the book, they note the importance of hyper-reflexivity in understanding the neo-colonial mindsets that shape ISL experiences and the need to ‘unlearn’ much of what we in the global North have learned about what knowledge is considered of value.

Both Chapters Sixteen and Seventeen present sets of standards of practice for developing ethical and reciprocal ISL programs. In Chapter Sixteen, Eric Hartman traces the history and development of the Fair Trade Learning standards through a set of long-standing relationships with Jamaican community members and U.S. university faculty, staff, and students involved in an ISL partnership. In Chapter Seventeen, Gonzalo Duarte provides a standard of practice framework for ISL sponsoring institutions, intermediary organizations, and host community partners seeking to ensure that ISL benefits are designed and shared amongst all stakeholders.

Allyson Larkin, in Chapter Eighteen, moves the conversation forward in proposing a set of possibilities for rethinking ISL as social justice education, with a focus on expanding the boundaries of Western knowledge through engagement with epistemologies from the global South. In the concluding chapter, Jennifer Kozak and Marianne Larsen bring together the main themes, ideas, and arguments presented throughout the book. They conclude that although global South communities face many challenges and barriers in hosting ISL students, the answer is not to abandon ISL, but...
rather to re-imagine ISL, with a focus on responsibility and the relationships upon which ISL is based.

PROBLEMATIZATION

The authors of this volume draw upon various critical theories in their work, including feminist and indigenous theories, as well as post-structural, post-colonial, and de-colonizing theories. Central to these critical approaches is the quest to problematize not only ISL research and practices, but also the values, knowledges, and assumptions that underlie ISL. There are distinct ways that we can use the term ‘problematization.’ First, problematizing can mean engaging critically with the world around us, viewing things as problems and questioning common sense assumptions about what is considered true or right. This idea is most commonly associated with the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, who introduced problematizing as a strategy for developing a critical consciousness, a pedagogical practice that disrupts taken-for-granted ‘truths’ by situating the “myths fed to the people by the oppressors” as problems (p. 172).

This idea of questioning taken-for-granted ‘truths’ was taken up by the French social theorist Michel Foucault, who, like Freire, sets out in his work to consider how certain things (behaviors, ideas, phenomena, processes, etc.), and not others come to be defined as problems and how this process leads to certain solutions and possibilities while foreclosing others. Problematizing, as Foucault (1977) explains, involves both understanding how and why certain things become problems and how they are shaped as particular objects for thought. The point of analysis is not to look for the one correct response to an issue, but to examine how it is “questioned, analysed, classified and regulated” at “specific times and under specific circumstances” (Deacon, 2000, p. 127). These ideas provoke us to think about how and why it is that the impact of ISL on student learning outcomes has been framed as a problem to be studied and improved, while the impact of ISL on host communities has not. What are the socio-historical conditions that make it (im)possible for us to think about host communities in particular ways? What are the effects and implications of framing one as a problem and the other as not? The authors of International Service Learning: Engaging with Host Communities explore possible answers to these sorts of problematizing questions. Here, I continue by problematizing notions of community, impact, service, and international service learning itself.

Problematizing Community

Community is generally considered a “warmly persuasive word” (Williams, 1976, p. 66), and yet it demands problematizing as a central concept in this book. The term community is complex and contested with multiple
meanings, including being a geographically bounded location or a constructed community (Cruz & Giles, 2000; Erasmus, 2011; Sandy & Holland, 2006). Constructed communities can be both inclusive and exclusive, involving tensions and conflicts between individual and community rights. As Dianne Gereluk (2006) explains in her study of education and community, there are “dominant discursive practices internal to the community; exclusive membership in the community that disadvantages non-members; and dominant discursive practices that exert pressure on individuals outside the community” (p. 42). As Nora Pillard Reynolds and Junior Gasparini point out in Chapter Three, communities are based on creating ‘Otherness’ by defining who we are against who we are not.

Problematizing community draws our attention as researchers to the choices we make in terms of which community members we invite to participate in our studies. Communities are not homogeneous monocultures, as Sandy and Holland (2006) remind us, and we need to attend to the diverse views and perceptions amongst community members in our research. To date, most of the SL, ISL, and study abroad literature reviewed above focuses on partnerships as representative of the community. Many of these studies involve interviews with SL coordinators or facilitators in partner (NGO) organizations. For example, Schroeder et al. (2009) interviewed faculty and professional staff partners and host agency personnel who participated in college international alternative spring break programs.

Many of the authors in this book (e.g., Barbara Heron, Cynthia Toms Smedley, and Jessica Arends) also focus on individuals in partner organizations in their ISL research. In many ways, these studies work from the assumption that individuals working in partner (NGO) organizations, as well as third-party ISL providers, are the community. However, as Erich Steinman (2011) points out, the problem with this is that NGOs are not the community, but they exist in relation to the community. Moreover, it is important to consider whose voices are not represented and/or are silenced in ISL-host community research and why. This may include vulnerable individuals who face educational, economic, or other socio-cultural barriers to participation, such as a host family mother unable to participate in a research study due to demands on her time and the belief that her husband would be best suited to represent the views of the family.

Finally, community in ISL research is most often conceptualized as something ‘out there’ beyond the university. The distancing of community as outside of oneself is problematic given that higher education institutions are (or should be) an integral part of the broader community, both local and global, within which they exist. Positing the university as outside of the community also suggests that the community does not include those performing service. As Benjamin Barber (1994) writes in *An Aristocracy of Everyone*:

Many draw a misleading and dangerous picture of service as the rich helping the poor or the poor paying a debt to their country as if
Marianne A. Larsen

‘community’ means only the disadvantaged and needy and does not include those performing service. (p. 210)

This deficit-based notion of community operates in tandem with conceptions of service as charity, which I turn to now.

Problematicizing Service

Most ISL initiatives promote the idea of helping, making a difference, and contributing to the future of others. As Kate Simpson (2004) argues, “The dominant ideology is that doing something is better than doing nothing, and therefore, that doing anything, is reasonable” (p. 685). What does this term ‘service’ mean? The word service originally comes from the Old French servis or Latin servitium (slavery) from servus (slave). It was defined as “the condition of being a servant; the fact of serving a master” and “the action of serving, helping, or benefitting” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989). This early definition of service, which hearkened back to the 12th century, suggests that the server as a slave lacks choice and is dependent and positioned below the one s/he serves. This earlier conception of service is also reflected in the contemporary practice of assigning service in criminal sentencing trials. As Eric Sheffield (2011) explains, there are educational manifestations of the idea of service as punishment: “[I]n many public schools, rule breakers can be found performing service to the school as punishment for unacceptable behavior. . . . It’s reminiscent of the chain-gang mentality . . . that viewed service performed in public as proof that rule breakers will be punished” (pp. 76–77).

The meaning of service shifted in the 18th century with the growth of the aristocracy and the development of the idea of noblesse oblige, which positions the aristocracy as a server helping (and having power over) the poor. Thus, we see a shift from the server as a slave lacking choice and autonomy, to the server as an independent actor. This conception of service has also been used in reference to the Western colonizing mission whereby service came to be associated with the mission and right to civilize the ‘Other.’ As Edward Said (1979) explains, in service to the colonial, imperial project, the Orientalist paradigm allowed European scholars to represent the East/Orient as inferior and backward, and the West as superior.

And yet there are other meanings associated with the word ‘service’ that challenge these asymmetrical, power-laden meanings. Service is at the core of the Catholic tradition of liberation theology, which arose in the 1960s out of the awareness of the Church’s responsibility for the situation of the poor (Berryman, 1987). Although liberation theology is based in Christian scripture, it has also been deeply influenced by Paulo Freire’s ideas about critical pedagogy stemming from his literacy work with Brazilian peasants. Dialogue and dialogic encounters, according to Freire (1970), are the essence of critical pedagogy, and there can be no real, meaningful social change
without an authentic engagement with the ‘Other.’ The Freirian notion of ‘conscientization’ posits the development of consciousness about the world we live in as an important step to changing the world. As Freire (1970) explains, “Critical pedagogy involves a constant unveiling of reality, the emergence of consciousness, and critical intervention in reality” (p. 69). The relationship between consciousness and ‘intervention’ is what Freire terms ‘praxis,’ the idea that through reflection and action, we can commit ourselves to transforming the world. Service, in this respect, can be viewed as an intervention, which carries with it the possibility of changing the world. This conception of service, based in a commitment to social justice, is central to liberation theology.

While Freire’s ideas have been influential, liberation theology is most firmly rooted in Christian faith and the call to show compassion to the poor as an expression of God’s faith. Gustavo Gutiérrez Merino, who is regarded as the founder of liberation theology, advanced the idea of the ‘preferential option for the poor,’ which calls upon Christians to acknowledge the multifaceted scope of poverty while standing in solidarity with the socially insignificant and excluded. True human fulfillment is found not in isolation, but in service to the community and especially the poor (Berryman, 1987; Stewart, 2009). In this respect, service is dependent on a strong commitment to human relationships and an ethic of care for the vulnerable and marginalized. In contrast to earlier asymmetrical notions of service (e.g., the server as a slave), service involves being in solidarity with the “insignificant and marginalized of society” in order to bring them to the “forefront of history” (Gutiérrez & Groody, p. 3). This relationship-based notion of service as solidarity and a commitment to social justice is reflected in numerous chapters throughout the book, especially in Allyson Larkin’s discussion of the African philosophy of Ubuntu in Chapter Eighteen.

Problematizing ISL

I end with problematizing the term ‘international service learning,’ which is the central topic of this book. The most commonly cited definition of ISL in the academic literature comes from Robert Bringle and Julie Hatcher (2011), who define ISL as:

A structured academic experience in another country in which the students (a) participate in an organized service activity that addresses identified community needs; (b) learn from the direct interaction and cross-cultural dialogue with others; and (c) reflect on the experience in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a deeper understanding of global and intercultural issues, a broader appreciation of the host country and the discipline and an enhanced sense of their own responsibilities as citizens, locally and globally. [emphasis in original] (p. 19)
While this definition is valuable in pointing to the academic nature of ISL, as well as the aims associated with cross-cultural and global understanding, the problem is that it focuses entirely upon what the student desires, does, and learns through ISL experiences. Learning results from interaction with the ‘Other’ and through the service provided to an identified community. The ‘Other’ is without subjectivity, illustrating the asymmetrical nature of the relationship where only students are positioned as ones who learn and serve.

Recently, terms such as international short-term volunteering, international volunteerism and service programs, or just simply voluntourism have arisen, the latter used primarily by critics of short-term volunteer abroad programs that have deleterious effects on host communities. What distinguishes these terms (and programs) from ISL programs is that they are not necessarily associated with an educational institution, but rather are facilitated through private third-party providers. Others use the term ‘international alternative breaks’ or alternative spring breaks to refer to a type of ISL designed as very short-term (1–2 weeks), service-based, educational programs abroad.

Global service learning (GSL) is a term that has emerged recently in place of ISL. (A number of authors in this book, including Eric Hartman, Jessica Arends, and Jessica Murphy have chosen to use it instead of ISL.) GSL is defined as “a community-driven service experience that employs structured, critically reflective practice to better understand common human dignity; self; culture; positionality; socio-economic, political, and environmental issues; power relations; and social responsibility, all in global contexts” (Hartman & Kiely, 2014, p. 60). As an immersive pedagogy, GSL views the process of learning differently from ISL in focusing on concepts of power, privilege, and hegemony; the broader contexts within which GSL is played out, such as the global marketization of voluntourism; and the responsibilities of the GSL student by engaging the critical global civic and moral imagination.

Scholars who champion the term GSL celebrate domestic service learning that involves crossing cultural borders domestically to engage in global issues through local service. GSL engages participants in the activity of deconstructing hegemonic structures of oppression and attempts to establish egalitarian epistemologies. The process of the democratization of knowledge is acted out in reciprocal partnerships between the university and the partnering community. GSL scholars and practitioners heavily emphasize the value of local knowledge in the community, and often refer to local and international NGOs they partner with in terms of co-educators (Murphy, 2015). In this way, GSL represents a more progressive understanding of what constitutes knowledge, the source(s) of knowledge, and how that knowledge is acquired through learning. These are important discursive developments, pushing ISL practitioners and researchers to commit to a more critical approach to their work. However, GSL, like its predecessor
ISL, still begins with the student and the development of their intercultural competence (Hartman & Kiely, 2014) through service. It is the privileging and coupling of ‘student’ learning and service that calls for further interrogation about who is able to learn and serve and why.

CONCLUSION

The authors of *International Service Learning: Engaging Host Communities* continue this process of problematizing the research they do and the ISL programs and practices they study and work within. The central concern is to better understand the impact and influence of ISL programs on communities in the global South that host global North ISL students. There is an urgent need for such research. As Anthony Ogden (2007) so eloquently puts it:

As international educators, our responsibilities lie not only in providing the highest quality programming for our students, but also in understanding the impact our presence has within our host communities. To ignore the fundamental principle that we are equally indebted to and reliant on our host communities for realizing the goals of our programming would be to undermine our basic aspirations to encourage meaningful intellectual and intercultural exchange. (p. 42–43)

We begin in the next chapter by exploring the specific ethical, methodological, and theoretical challenges associated with carrying out ISL research.

NOTE

1. Thank you to Allyson Larkin for pointing out this aspect of liberation theology to me.

REFERENCES


